197 systems of signs and ideograms which may be considered as a sort of
212 writing and the study of which is currently pursued. The system from which all the others supposedly stem, the glã glã zo, has 226 ideograms which, according to informants, summarize the knowledge of the
[182] Bambara (1). On the other hand, the Bamba use a numerical system

1. See. p. 21. This system and two of the ideograms, of which to designates the mash of boiled cereals and by extension nourishment in general, will be the object of a comment by M. Griaule and G. Dieterlen. "Signes graphiques des Soudanais. L'Homme. /Graphic signs of the Sudanese man/." Cahiers d'ethnologie, de géographie et de linguistique, Hermann (in press).
On certain types of writing observed among the Mandé and the Vai, see J. Février, Histoire de l'écriture /The History of Writing/, pp. 528-529.

based on twenty. Moreover, an analysis of the texts collected, some of them quoted in this essay, has brought to light an /xvi/ important number of words which, according to informants, belong to an ancient language of Mandingo origin, now used as liturgical language. It is not within the framework of this essay to present this material or to comment upon it, but it is appropriate to note that the study of this vocabulary would contribute to an understanding of religious thinking among the Bambara.

173 The Bambara have a rather clear idea of their early history and even of their prehistory. They describe their ancestors with precision and know the phases of development of their technology. These premises are necessary to an understanding of their religion which, like the other institutions, is especially linked to this technological development. Moreover, the only observable remains comprise household furniture and utensils, transient but perennial material whose forms and ornamentation indicate the metaphysical principles on which their way of thinking is based.

177 It is appropriate not to neglect those influences which have acted
121 upon the Bambara through their contacts with other Sudanese tribes

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connected since ancient times with the Mediterranean basin (1). The

1. We wish to draw attention to M. P. M. Schuhl's point and his allusion: "The premises which we owe at present to investigations like those of M. Griaule would seem to call for new syntheses and provide curious terms of comparison. Indirect influence from Greek myths on Sudanese mythology is, furthermore, not impossible." Essai sur la formation de la pensée grecque /Essay on the Formation of Greek Thought/, Presses Universitaires de France, 2nd ed., 1949, p. xv.

M. Schuhl recalls, on the other hand, the resemblances proposed by M. A. Jeanmaire, between Greek facts and some African institutions considered as survivals of a proto-Mediterranean civilization (Couroi et courètes), Lille, 1939.

Mali empires, in particular, by encouraging the expansion of Islam have maintained a center in the heart of the Sudan, which has left traces in the social and religious institutions of the Bambara.

However, it is difficult, if not impossible, at the present time to make a historical presentation of this religion or even to consider the problem of influences. We have with us the last phase of this religion and we know its development only through myths which, furthermore, do not make it appear to be a system established very early; it seems to have developed slowly with various additions which were felt and expressed in the myths. On the other hand the present religions of the Sudanese seem national; they form separate entities among the Dogon (2) the Bozo, the Kouroumba /Kurumba/, the

2. See M. Griaule. Dieu d'eau /water god/.

Minianka, the Sonray /Sonhrai/, and the /xvii/ Mossi. However, it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that their systematic observation, undertaken a few years ago, has brought to light a common

177 substratum on which each tribe has grafted its original system. The
121 study of this substratum would help define the problem of origins and influences.

After this, we have at our disposal the support of philology and above all the advantage of seeing the Bambara live their beliefs and of discovering their myths in a crude but expressive material as well as in numerous rites. The observations made over a wide field of inquiry serve as the basis for the presentation of this religious system.

114 The Bambara have been for a long time the subject of articles and
121 works, of which we will give below a concise bibliography. The only author who, until now, has attempted to describe their beliefs as a system is L. Tauxier whose study of La Religion Bambara /Bambara religion/ takes into account to a large extent the works of the Abbé Henry and Ch. Monteil. However, through the descriptions of these different observers which are certainly conscientious, this religion appears as a composite of diverse and even inconsistent elements with no apparent link between them. Despite a uniform plan and a laudable absence of preconceived ideas, L. Tauxier has been unable to bring out the fundamental concepts of the people he observed.

In fact, the study of a present-day Negro religion runs into difficulties of various kinds stemming on the one hand from the necessity of going into the field and on the other hand from the largely esoteric character of the doctrine. These circumstances make this study essentially a work of discovery.

Indeed, Bambara religion, like all Sudanese religions, has an exoteric part, quite easily accessible, which observation conducted along scientific lines may reveal in detail. Rules of life admitted by all, beliefs openly professed, and public or private practices may be the object of detailed work. But this religion, like that of the neighboring peoples, rests upon a doctrine whose fundamental principles
[609] are known to elders and initiates who show considerable aversion to confiding in strangers, particularly whites. Such a situation explains the ignorance in which scholarship has remained for so long concerning the religious way of thinking of this people (1).

812 1. The Bambara themselves distinguish between two kinds of knowledge. The first, called doni fyɛ̃ma "knowledge (which has) wind" /xviii/ is superficial

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and considered to be "the introduction to beliefs and customs." It belongs to adults who know little of cosmology. On the contrary, the second, called "deep knowledge" (doniya duna or kuru doniya), is restricted to priests, heads of families, elders of both sexes who are versed in "the science of the things of creation." It can only be acquired slowly in the course of successive initiations and through actual instruction which is sometimes diffused during the rites.

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/xviii/ A rigorous method of observation which neglects no detail and which involves the use of close collaboration from the natives has brought forth a system coherent in all its parts and, it may be said, based on a metaphysics hitherto unknown. Taking the Bambara postulates as a point of departure, the sequence of events through the myths, the development of institutions and technology, their operation and the actual destiny of man in the cosmos all unfold in a logical framework.

On the other hand, this system is projected into the concrete in the form of symbols which borrow the most diversified aspects and which play an active role. The symbolism not only penetrates religious life proper by appearing in the sanctuaries, in the cult materials (shapes and sign writing), or during religious ceremonies (times and places, rituals, etc.), but is present in every aspect of secular life and daily behavior.

The metaphysics and the religion of this people offer a structural entity which includes all social, technological, and economic activities. In the following chapters, we shall attempt to clarify these principles and this system. We believe we may safely state that certain inconsistencies or contradictions presented by the religious system as it is described here are not due to Bambara thought—even though it is subtle and based on a dialectic—but to lacunae in the investigation.

791 this song calms his restlessness and gives him back peace and serenity.
533 "Whatever man is, he may not go beyond God" (1). The Soma
787

1. Moko a kera čokočoko a te teme ngala ka.

plays this air if the consulter harbors bad intentions or if he is ignorant or stubborn. He does the same to discover the gifts of a child and to encourage the family to develop his learning.

"Joy embellishes the world" (2) is performed for futile and pleasant [illegible]

2. Klo ye dĩne dya.

things: feasts and dances, ornaments.

787 Divination, in a large measure, is the application of the static
801 and dynamic quality of numbers. On the one hand these translate the relationships; on the other, they are symbols for phenomena, beings, behaviors, situations, and in general all the constituent parts of the universe. Though not endowed with power in themselves, they symbolize powerful and well regulated elements. It may also be said that the numbers are superior realities, the same as the primordial signs which preceded the perceptibility of all things and on account of which the things began to exist once man had taken them into his consciousness. (3)

3. See p. 17.

In the course of divination, they indicate to the individual or collective consulter his personal position with regard to the rest of the universe. In a way, they permit the formulation of a particular equation for each person at a given time.

CONCLUSION

121 /227/ It is only recently that the discipline of silence adhered to by the Blacks has been relaxed in certain circles of the initiates. Human behavior, backed up by a rigorous method, has allowed a group of researchers to establish a documentation which suffers less from the usual faults. It is no longer superficial or fragmentary; it is

[2] no longer encumbered with a systematic hostility, which by its consistency and generalized character misled us for many years.

Until the present, the facts gathered among the Bambara were chiefly concerned with appearances. The institutions which might be referred to as "mysteries" were only known through allusions made inadvertently by a mulish people. This was true to such an extent that, for example, in the functioning of the Komo the personality of the universal Monitor had never even figured.

But the study of these people suffered from a constraint more serious than esoterism or distrust: the skepticism and indifference of scholarship which systematically, so to speak, has failed to recognize or has denied the existence of a profound thought among the Blacks.

This contribution demonstrates that certain difficulties in approaching the work may be untangled on the one hand, and that on the other it is no longer appropriate to hold an image of the tropical African world as one in which nothing is harmonious, great, or even worthy of speculation.

This contribution also proves the complexity of the facts. A few only were selected from a vast documentation, the work of a team. And even this documentation appears infinitesimal compared to that which can be foreseen.

The fact is that the Bambara—and like him many other Blacks—makes of man a universe and of the universe a system where everything has a place and a role, from the heavenly bodies to objects of everyday usage, from the mind of man to his ordure.

Years of patient research will therefore be necessary to reveal the immense network of representations and rituals so as not to overlook any materials or gestures, however insignificant in appearance. /228/ We know, in fact, from experience that behind each utensil looms a facet of the organization of men, and that a few lines incised without artistry with a fingernail on a wall express the unfolding of creation.

The negligence of the lowliest of these details may shut off whole areas of knowledge. This entails extensive work covering all the activities of a people, not only that which is properly classified in our mind as religious.

Even if we assume a knowledge of an imposing body of facts concerning the Bambara, this would only lend itself to speculation of a specific nature. A description of the structure and function of the religion of these people would certainly constitute a valuable addition to human

12| knowledge. However, the same effort would have to be undertaken with regard to their neighbors so that gradually from one tribe to the next, it can be extended to the whole Black world.

For it is true that, however indispensable it is to order the facts concerning the Bambara themselves and to seek an internal explanation, the comparative method is necessary for the understanding of a religion. This method imposes itself with particular force in this context. The Bambara system does appear to be, on the one hand, the original synthesis of several other systems found by them on the spot at the time when they made their ultimate settlement, or brought along at the time of the great migratory movements. On the other hand this system is in a state of perpetual symbiosis with those of other Sudanese peoples, as is proved indubitably by recent observations.

12| 17| 779 At present we can already state that at least nine tribes of varying importance (1) live on the same metaphysical, if not religious,

1. In the order of increasing depth of studies, we cite the following groups: Dogon and Bambara, blacksmiths, Kouroumba (or Foulsé), Bozo, Manding, Samogo /Samoro/, Mossi, Koulé, altogether amounting to more than two million people. It is fitting to note likewise that several tens of peoples or tribes of the Sudan (in the wider meaning of the word) consider themselves of the same origin. Important rituals, materials, agents, and places reinforce this belief (see p. 2).

foundation. They have a common theme of the creation by means of a word, which is originally motionless and whose vibration determines little by little the essence and later the existence of all things. The same is true of the movement of the universe in a conical spiral which is constantly extending itself. They share the same conception of the person, as well as of the primordial duality, the expression of perfect unity. All these peoples admit the mediation by a hypostasis of the divinity which sometimes takes on the aspect of a redeemer, master of a world, whose appearance is everywhere identical. All believe in the necessity /229/ of universal harmony as well as that of the internal harmony of beings, both being related. One of the

121 corollaries of this notion is the subtle mechanism of disorder which we
171 call impurity for lack of a better term, and which goes hand in hand
779 with that of highly developed cathartic practices.

Finally, all these offer an extraordinary efflorescence—not to be called abuse—of the spoken, written, drawn, or gesticulated symbols many of which are found everywhere, each one of them being the basis for several levels of images.

We may therefore speak from now on of a Sudanese civilization whose substratum may be discerned among many tribes as it has been among the Dogon and the Bambara in particular. Under the diversity of languages and institutions is hidden the same framework of representations. It is as though each tribe had arranged the designs characteristic of its own genius on an identical canvas.

121 For this reason, it is appropriate to consider the present essay as a first step toward an understanding of this civilization. In the future, this vast entity will have to take its place in relation to the Mediterranean and Asiatic system. And there is no doubt that this search for its position will bring up problems of borrowings, migrations, and assimilation. And doubtless, too, an anatomy of the old civilizations which had taken refuge in the western impasse in Africa will throw a valuable light on the primitive organizations which were found in contact with each other during the high period in these regions, and which were able toeffect a union between indigenous ways of thinking and others with which we are more familiar.

It is tempting to reconstruct archaic states of humanity with the help of broken potsherds or literary shreds. In the more favorable cases, abundant texts and materials have permitted syntheses, whose vicissitudes are one of the reasons for the existence of erudition. On no occasion has anyone ever been discouraged by terrains without echoes, by the absence of the authors of texts and materials. Thus, a wealth of activity concerning the situations and thoughts of ancient times was instituted, a kind of science shrouded in silence where the spirit of research alone was alive.

Today it seems possible, in the light of new observations, to find among numerous and diverse living people, archaic forms and wellsprings common to men of another color living in another time. This does not imply that one should disregard the cautious advice given by the men of the old schools (1); but this advice rests /230/ on postulates

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1. Among others J. Toutain, C. R. des Garnered Shelves de J. Frazer /Report on the Garnered Shelves by J. Frazer/.

concerning the absence of historical documents and the difference in periods. To admit these postulates, it is necessary to prove precisely this absence and also the incapability of oral tradition to keep alive the traditions and ways of viewing the world over long periods of time.

In any event, whatever the opinion adopted, it would be good methodology to admit as an immediate hypothesis the probable or possible role played by the Sudanese world as a preserver or transformer of attitudes, rites, and concepts which scholars find everywhere else but which remain unexplained. For in a few years nothing will remain to be either disclaimed or confirmed concerning these systems which are on their way to rapid disintegration. Because of mechanization and an unconscious wish for self destruction the Black civilizations will soon become only a shadow of their former selves and the instability of their material will not allow them to be reconstituted in their complexity and grandeur.

And whatever the fate of this hypothesis, we may find, as a result of such thinking that the religious thought of the Blacks, whether original or not, will take its place in the philosophy of history and in the history of humanity.

/231/ ADDENDA

000 The research conducted in the field during the publishing of the present work has brought to light the following facts which, we believe, it will be useful to present succinctly to the reader.

Chapter 1

776 825 Because of the loss of the seeds in their collarbones, Pemba and Mousso Koroni actually have an animal aspect which they owe to their impurity as well as to that of the uncultivated earth which they symbolize. Pemba is represented by the warableni (Vulpes pallida) and Mousso Koroni by the kongowuluni (unidentified fox). It is this

[1] Introduction

161 According to the census referred to hereafter, the Bambara number more than 500,000, thus forming one of the largest population groups in West Africa.

184 This group is not homogeneous; however, in addition to its language, which is in fact its characteristic element, it does have certain basic customs common - at least in a general way - to all its members. It is possible to observe this common heritage by [121] studying one section of the group, and such is the purpose of this work.

121 The Bambara of Ségou and Kaarta, who concern us here, have the distinction over their congeners of having evolved well-127 known empires. To the history of these empires, already known through the research of my predecessors, I shall add new documentation, based primarily on an unpublished chronicle of the empire of Ségou. This chronicle is interesting, among other reasons, because it is entirely the work of one of the traditionists whose erudition, as reliable and exact as possible within the limitations of native competence, merits our serious attention. Indeed, my book is simply a detailed commentary on this chronicle, buttressed by knowledge acquired on the spot during the course of my administrative duties and by information obtained from the works listed in the bibliography.

121 It should be noted that, though these documents and this store of knowledge make it easy enough to describe the customs if one limits oneself to generalities, it is on the other hand a difficult and delicate task to define the customs as they are applied to given social manifestations and to try to deduce the principles underlying these manifestations.

This is all the more true in that experience acquired elsewhere [2] is often, instead of a help, a reef which is as perilous as it is appealing. So it is that one is naturally tempted to apply to native institutions the nomenclature and the fundamental characteristics of institutions - especially European ones - which are assumed to be comparable. When origins and development are thus transferred to a foreign context, native custom is deformed. It can

keep its own features only on the native plane on which it was formed and developed.

I have not felt, however, that it was necessary to abandon entirely the French terminology which is familiar to us; it is sufficient to make it fit its new role. Indeed, it would be very difficult to limit oneself to native terms, since it would be awkward and even impossible to find expression in these terms for abstractions which the writer's analysis brings out and of which the native has no knowledge.

A study of custom in its intimate associations thus requires both method and experience if one hopes to arrive at precise facts which have logical interrelationships. The results thus obtained are certainly significant since they show that, perhaps from the very beginning and certainly from a very long time past, the native character follows a path which it has itself chosen and which we can only suspect, rather than observe. This is because the concrete facts which are the landmarks of that history are subject to various interpretations.

Today, dislocated by the collapse - thanks to our intervention - of the social framework in which he was developing, the native character is working out new spiritual directives based on its own past, making use of contributions of our civilizations whenever they are in accord with the native's own deepest tendencies. The present-day life of the Black man is merely the reflection of this mystique; hence, whatever may be our wishes in the matter and whatever may be the outward appearances, the Black man continues in all fields to be dominated by his past.

This fact would in itself justify a study such as the present one - if there were need for justification - for, in the matter of custom particularly, nothing that has happened in the past is unimportant when both the present and the future are closely and inevitably dependent on this past.

Orthez, February 22, 1923

121 This work deals only with the Bambara of Ségou and Kaarta since it has already been noted that, save for their specifically local history, [4] a study of their concepts and institutions is valid in general for all of the Bambara.

103 131 It is exceedingly difficult, besides, to be entirely certain as to which of the Bambara actually belong to the Kaarta and

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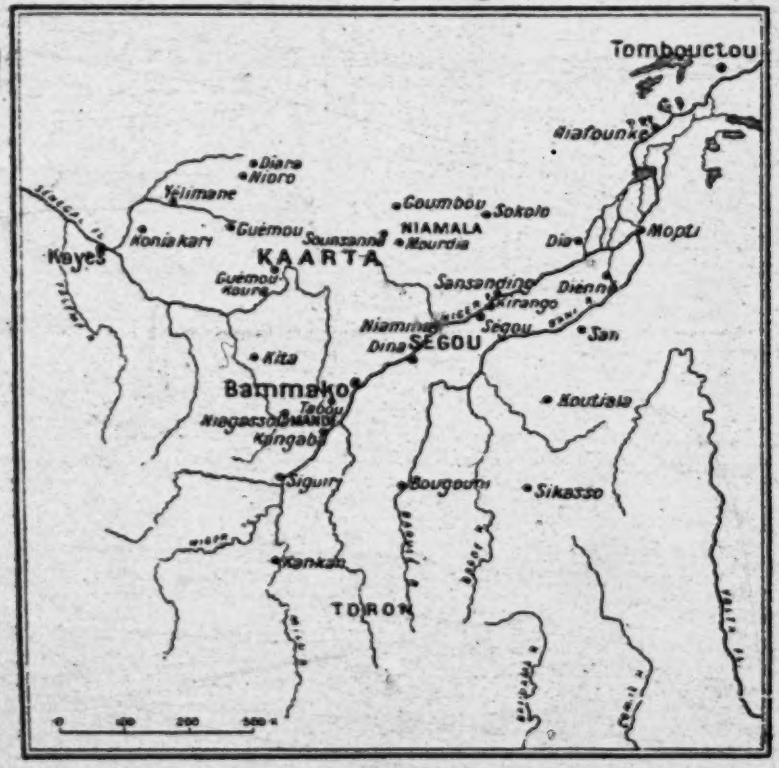

Ségou areas since the two designations do not correspond to any very exact geographical region. When a native speaks of Kaarta or of Ségou, he only vaguely understands the terms, and this with good reason.

101 103 131 I have noted elsewhere (1) that, etymologically speaking, the

1. In my work Les Khassonké [The Kasonke], which appeared in the series, Revue du Monde Musulman.